MONSTRESS

MARJORIE LIU
SANA TAKEDA

image
ISSUE 3

ISSUE #3

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MARJORIE LIU • SANA TAKEDA

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THE STORY SO FAR... In the aftermath of a terrible war, the Federation of Man is still in conflict with supernatural Arcanic hybrids, whose bodies are harvested for lilium, a powerful substance coveted by a human religious order called the Cumaea. Maika Halfwolf, an Arcanic teen, is on the run after breaking into a Cumaean stronghold, murdering one of its elders, and stealing from her an artifact of great power: a fragment of an ancient mask that might provide a clue to the murder of Maika's mother.

Joined by an Arcanic girl named Kippa, Maika is aided in her escape by Master Ren – a talking cat who may know more than he lets on – and a kindly human woman, Emilia. Danger is close on their heels: the Cumaean Mother Superior has dispatched her Inquisitrixes to track down Maika. But the real threat is from within. An unexplained hunger still grips Maika – a force inside her that seems to have a mind of its own, and is taking control over her life. When she slips away into the forest, hoping to save her new friends from her uncontrollable urges, she is set upon by an Inquisitrix – and when Maika tries to fight back, a terrifying and unknown creature bursts from the stump of her amputated arm...

MONSTRESS CREATED BY MARJORIE LIU & SANA TAKEDA

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OH...

...THAT FEELS...

...GOOD.

DEMON.

I CAN FEEL... THE NIGHT ON MY SKIN...

...THE MOON... IS SWEET.

KR-CHING

YAAHHH!

I HAVE... SLEPT TOO LONG...

...AND I HAVE NOT FELT....

TINK

...SO ALIVE...

...IN A THOUSAND... YEARS....

...BUT... WHO... ARE... YOU?

NO...

...THIS IS NOT HAPPENING...

WHY... DO I ALREADY KNOW... YOUR FACE...?

LEAVE ME ALONE!

HRMM.

THIS... WILL NOT DO...

THE MASK... SHOULD NOT... STILL EXIST.

AS FOR YOU: YOU WILL LET ME GO.

YOU WILL LET ME... SLEEP...

WHAM

... AND EAT...

... A... SHAME...

... YOU LET A GOOD MEAL... GET AWAY.

CRRUNCH

... NOW... I AM TIRED AGAIN...

... AND I FEEL SO STRANGE...

... I CAN ALMOST IMAGINE...

... YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I AM SAYING...

I CAN'T BEGIN TO TELL YOU WHAT AN UNEEDED DISTRACTION THIS IS, YVETTE.

THESE ARE PRECARIOUS DAYS IN THE FEDERATION. THE NEW PRIME MINISTER REQUIRES MY *CONSTANT* GUIDANCE.

AND AS FOR THIS, *OLD FRIEND*...

...YOU CLAIM THIS IS THE DAUGHTER OF MORIKO HALFWOLF?

MORIKO'S DAUGHTER *DIED*. WE WERE SHOWN A BODY. BURNED BEYOND RECOGNITION.

LIKE YOUR UNFORTUNATE DAUGHTER.

AND YET MY DAUGHTER LIVES, DESTRIA. AS DOES MAIKA. HER DEATH WAS A LIE.

I ALWAYS KNEW IT. MORIKO WOULD HAVE KILLED A THOUSAND GIRLS TO KEEP HER DAUGHTER SAFE.

SHE KILLED AT LEAST A DOZEN BEFORE THAT NIGHT, JUST SO MAIKA WOULDN'T NEED TO BE PART OF THE EXPERIMENT.

MORIKO NEVER DID LEAVE ANYTHING TO CHANCE.

WE SHOULD BE MORE LIKE HER.

GAZE UPON ZAMORA, YVETTE. THE MOST ANCIENT CITY OF THE TRUCE-LANDS.

SOON ALL THIS WILL BE FEDERATION TERRITORY... AND ZAMORA WILL BE A STRONGHOLD FOR THE CUMAEA.

AS LONG AS THE ARCANICS DO NOT ACQUIRE THE WHOLE MASK. THEY MUST ALREADY POSSESS A PART OF IT. THERE'S NO OTHER WAY THEY COULD HAVE DESTROYED CONSTANTINE.

NO REPORTS FROM YOUR INQUISITRIX GUARD, MOST HOLY MOTHER.

...THEIR SILENCE TROUBLES ME.

NO *GIRL* SHOULD HAVE ELUDED THEM.

AS I SAID, THIS IS NO ORDINARY GIRL.

I CAN FEEL THAT FRAGMENT OF THE MASK, DESTRIA. IT CONTINUES TO MOVE AWAY FROM US.

GIVE MY DAUGHTER THE LILIUM SHE NEEDS TO STAY ALIVE, AND I'LL DELIVER IT *AND* THE HALFWOLF.

POOR, *POOR* YVETTE. DON'T YOU REALIZE THAT FRAGMENT WILL NEVER BE YOURS AGAIN?

WHAT MADE YOU THINK YOU COULD CONTROL IT IN THE FIRST PLACE?

ONLY AN ARCANIC CAN WIELD THAT POWER, AND YOU'RE A DAUGHTER OF EDEN, THROUGH AND THROUGH.

YOU'RE *HUMAN.*

WE WERE *ALL* CHANGED THAT NIGHT.

I, BY CHOICE. *GLADLY.* UTTERLY. *DIVINELY.* BUT YOU...

HOW I WAS CHANGED IS NOT TO BE DISCUSSED. *EVER.*

DOES MAIKA STILL POSSESS WHAT HER *MOTHER* GAVE HER? DOES SHE REMEMBER ANYTHING?

I DON'T KNOW.

BUT SHE'S EVEN *MORE* TERRIBLE THAN MORIKO.

I DOUBT THAT.

FWEEEEEE

YES. I DOUBTED, TOO.

AND THEN I WAS DEAD.

SHOW YOURSELF, MOTHER-FUCKER.

OR I WILL TEAR... I WILL TEAR YOU THE FUCK OUT OF ME.

MAIKA!

WHAT ARE YOU *DOING?*

NOTHING, CAT. MIND YOUR OWN FUCKING BUSINESS.

THIS *IS* MY BUSINESS.

WHERE'S THE INQUISITRIX?

I... I DON'T KNOW. GONE. I THINK.

THAT'S TRUE ONLY IF SHE'S DEAD. DON'T TELL ME YOU WERE ABLE TO *KILL* HER?

NO.

BUT I SCARED HER.

AH.

HURRY. WE HAVE TO RETURN TO CAMP. SOLDIERS HAVE FOUND EMILIA AND KIPPA. I CAN HEAR IT.

...YOU'RE NOT COMING?

THEY'RE NO ONE TO ME.

YOU STARTED TO TELL ME SOMETHING IN THESE WOODS.

ABOUT HOW YOU MURDERED A BOY, AND OTHERS. HOW YOU... HUNGER... AND DON'T KNOW WHY.

I KNOW WHAT THE HUNGER IS.

"DON'T LIE TO US. THE MEN SAID YOU WERE TRAVELING WITH A GIRL.

"A GIRL WHO HAS ONLY ONE ARM."

HOW IS IT A LIE IF I DON'T KNOW WHERE SHE WENT? I WAS *ASLEEP* WHEN YOU FOUND ME.

THOSE FOOL MEN ARE THE WORST KIND OF TROUBLEMAKERS.

AN ARCANIC WAS DEFINITELY HERE, DA'CHANG. THE DOGS CAN SCENT THE BEAST. MAYBE MORE THAN ONE.

THIS WAY!

NO SCENT... BE INVISIBLE...

NO SCENT... BE INVISIBLE...

NOOOOO!

GIVE ME BACK MY BABY!

WAAAAH

SE'VENA, BRING US YOUR BAYONET.

DO IT.

NO. PLEASE.

AND PLACE IT, BLADE UP, RIGHT HERE WHERE MY FOOT IS.

DA'CHANG? WHAT --

WAAAAH

WAAAAH

WAAAAH

SO. DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO TELL ME NOW?

NYAAIIY

NNNGH! RUN!

DAMN IT. GET THOSE HORSES!

GAH!

EMILIA! RUN!

NNNAAAAHH!

SWEETIE...

WAAAAH

COME ON... COME ON... DON'T YOU WANT TO PLAY?

GOT YOU!

FWAP

NO!

NNNGH!

WHAT --?

HUFF HUFF HUFF

SOMEONE TORE OFF ITS HORN.

SWEET MARIUM.

SCHLUKK

BLAM

THUD

CRAZY BITCH.

DA'CHANG IS DEAD. SO IS SE'VANA. THAT CAT TORE OUT HER THROAT.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

=GASP=

WE NEED THOSE HORSES. THE SLAVE COLLARS ARE IN THE SADDLEBAGS.

THE LILIUM THEY'RE MADE WITH IS WORTH MORE THAN WE ARE. WE LEAVE THOSE OUT HERE, THE COMMANDER WILL HAVE OUR GUTS FOR GARTERS.

MISS MONSTER?

WE NEED TO HEAD BACK. WE'RE TOO CLOSE TO THE WALL. AND THE MOON IS FULL.

"WAKE UP, MISS."

SFX: GASP

MOTHER.

LISTEN CAREFULLY, MAIKA.

THIS IS THE NAME YOU MUST NEVER FORGET.

NO!

FORGET MY NAME BEFORE YOU FORGET THIS.

MOTHER?

WHAT... ARE YOU DOING INSIDE ME?

HOW ... DARE ... YOU!

=UNH=

WHERE ARE WE? WHERE ARE ALL THE SOLDIERS?

WE'RE =SNIFF= NEXT TO THE WALL, MISS.

THE SOLDIERS =SNIFF= TRACKED THEIR HORSES THROUGH A BREAK AND =SNIFF= WENT INTO THE WILD LANDS LOOKING FOR THEM.

YOU, SHUT UP.

WHERE ARE MY THINGS?

HEY! DOWN ON YOUR KNEES!

I ASKED YOU A QUESTION.

AIEEE!!

"WE'RE GOING TO FUCKING DIE OUT HERE."

KEEP IT TOGETHER.

NO WAY. I'D RATHER FACE THE COMMANDER THAN BE CRAWLING AROUND ARCANIC TERRITORY.

THEY EAT PEOPLE.

THESE DOGS HAVE SHIT FOR NOSES. WHERE ARE THE HORSES?

DAMN IT, WE'RE LOST.

SHUT UP, ALL OF YOU.

WE PUSH ON. JUST FOR A LITTLE LONGER.

OH, NO.

HOW... CREATIVE.

DON'T PRETEND, TONG.

WE KNOW YOU HATE PEOPLE WHO HURT ANIMALS.

THE GIRL ALONE COULDN'T HAVE DONE THIS, COULD SHE?

WHAT IS IT, HAMMER?

RUSTLE RUSTLE RUSTLE

NNNUUGH!

...MONSTRA...

... MONSTRA ARE FREE...

...THE GIRL... SHE... IS...

...I SAW... HER TRUE... FORM...

TONG. TAKE FLAY BACK TO ZAMORA.

HAMMER AND I WILL FINISH THE HUNT.

ARE YOU SCARED OF ME?

...YES.

DON'T CRY.

ONCE I GET BACK MY BELONGINGS, I'LL LEAVE YOU WITH EMILIA.

WHERE WILL YOU GO, MISS?

WE HAVE THAT MUCH IN COMMON. I'M SCARED OF ME, TOO.

WHEN I WAS IN THE CUMAEA COMPOUND I FOUND A PHOTOGRAPH THAT HAD MY MOTHER IN IT.

AND OTHER PEOPLE I DON'T REMEMBER.

THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER, YEARS AGO. LOOKING FOR SOMETHING...

SOMETHING THAT MADE ME.

SO I'LL GO SOUTH, TO THYRIA.

I KNOW SOMEONE WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO TELL ME WHO ELSE IS IN THAT PHOTOGRAPH.

YOU SHOULDN'T EAT PEOPLE.

LOOK, LITTLE FOX.

DOES YOUR FAMILY PRAY TO THEM?

NO, MISS.

BUT WE LEFT THEM OFFERINGS.

MISS?

DOES IT SEE US?

NO.

THE DEAD DON'T SEE.

AN EXCERPT OF A LECTURE FROM THE ESTEEMED **PROFESSOR TAM TAM**, FORMER FIRST RECORD-KEEPER OF THE IS'HAMI TEMPLE, AND LEARNED CONTEMPORARY OF NAMRON BLACK CLAW...

EVEN NOW THE POETS CANNOT AGREE ON WHAT CAUSED THE FIRST MODERN SCHISM BETWEEN THE FEDERATION OF MAN AND THE ARCANIC EMPIRE.

IT WAS, TO QUOTE THE NEKOMANCER VA'KANDER NINE-TAIL, *"LIKE A SERIES OF CLAW PRICKS THAT BLED THE CAT SLOWLY TO DEATH."*

ONE OF THOSE WOUNDS, DEEPER THAN THE REST, TOOK PLACE THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN CONSTANTINE, NOT LONG AFTER THE CUMAEAN ORDER BEGAN ITS ASCENSION AS A TRUE FORCE WITHIN THE FEDERATION.

A YOUNG WITCH-NUN BEGAN AN ILLICIT AFFAIR WITH AN ARCANIC STONE MASON, AND BORE A DAUGHTER WHO, MUCH TO HER CHAGRIN, LOOKED A GREAT DEAL LIKE THE FATHER.

THE CUMAEA ARE ***NOT*** VIRGINS, BUT THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO KEEP THEIR BLOOD ***PURE.*** AND EVEN THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO AT THE END OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT, THE WITCH-NUNS HAD BEGUN TO PREACH THAT ARCANICS WERE ***UNCLEAN*** CREATURES.

RATHER THAN GIVE THE CHILD TO HER ARCANIC FATHER, THE MOTHER SUPERIOR HAD HER ***KILLED.*** HER CORPSE DUMPED INTO A BOX, AND LEFT AT THE STONE MASON'S DOOR LIKE ***TRASH.*** THE YOUNG WITCH-NUN WHO BORE THE CHILD WAS ALSO EXECUTED.

THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE HUMAN FEDERATION DECLARED THE MURDERS A ***RELIGIOUS DECREE,*** AND THEREFORE OUTSIDE THE JURISDICTION OF THE LAW. IT SET A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT: THAT THE CUMAEA COULD BEHAVE AS THEY WISHED WITHIN FEDERATION TERRITORY, WITHOUT PENALTY OR OVERSIGHT.

OUTRAGE SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE ARCANIC EMPIRE -- FROM THE DUSK COURT TO THE DAWN COURT, FROM THYRIA TO ARKANGELUS -- A FURY MADE WORSE BY ONE LAST ADDED INSULT...

THE MOTHER SUPERIOR WAS NEVER PUNISHED FOR HER CRIME.

THE CUMAEA TOOK THAT PRIVILEGE AND POWER -- AND ONCE TAKEN, IT WAS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO WREST IT FROM THEM, THOUGH LATER PRIME MINISTERS MADE SOME SMALL, SUCCESSFUL, ATTEMPTS.

CLEARLY, IT WAS NOT ENOUGH.

MONSTRESS MAIL

Calling all Monstros!

Our little team has been blown away by your support for MONSTRESS. Thank you for the amazing, heartfelt reception – it's more than we dreamed, and your continued enthusiasm means the world to us.

We're working hard to bring you the best book possible, but because we front-loaded MONSTRESS with that triple-sized first issue, we knew right from the beginning that Sana would need to take a couple weeks to catch up – art this beautiful doesn't happen overnight!

With that said, we're taking a planned break in February – very brief – and we'll be back in March with Issue #4, picking up right where we left off. I can't wait for you to read what happens next. Life for Maika and Kippa is about to get even more perilous now that they're over the wall. Just because they're entering Arcanic territory doesn't mean they're safe…

- *Marjorie*

And now, on to your letters!

I absolutely loved the first issue! Best value I've gotten for a hot minute in a comic. The look reminded me of *Final Fantasy VIII* – the Victorian influence and ubiquity of magic – and the tone reminded me of the Spanish Inquisition – one of the most terrifying periods of history in my book. I reread it immediately, and I look forward to seeing where the story goes. Thanks for putting so much work into this, and I can't wait to subscribe tomorrow!

V/R,
Justin D.

I can't believe how incredible MONSTRESS #1 was! From the moment I heard it announced earlier this year at Image Expo, I was excited to see the collaboration between two of my favorite women in comics. But seeing the first hint of the world you two have created in Issue #1 has far exceeded all of my hopes and dreams. I didn't think Sana could surpass her beautiful work in *Drain* or *Soulfire: Shadow Magic*, but this is a whole new level. Not to mention the intense and dark concepts that Marjorie has spread throughout the book. I'm hooked and I can't wait to read more about Maika, or to discover the story behind the Monstra or those treacherous cats!

Sincerely,
Mathias L.

I first heard about MONSTRESS at the 'Where Creators Own Worlds' panel at the New York Comic Con. I was intrigued by the art, the story, your passion, and the backstory for the comic, so I preordered it that night.

After reading the first issue, I am definitely hooked. Sana's art really captures the steampunk genre, and the length of the issue really made me appreciate the art even more. The story is unique, and I am excited to learn about Maika's past and future. It's amazing how 66 pages still leaves a reader wanting more!

Quick question: Is there any specific literature (perhaps gothic) that influenced you?

Ryan G.

Hi Ryan! Thank you so much for the kind words. And that's a great question! I can't remember a time when I haven't been surrounded by books, and I'm sure all of them have had some influence – epic fantasy novels, mysteries and thrillers, the gothic. But poets are my first and best literary mentors – there is nothing more powerful than a poem, nothing that satisfies quite as much, or moves as deeply through me. My favorite poets, the poets I keep close at hand (for now, because there's a rotation) are: Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Lu Xun, Staceyann Chin, Li-Young Lee, Ruth Forman, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Lauren Alleyne.

While it's nice to see growing Asian representation in media, it's even better if it comes from Asian creators. I'd like to thank you for sharing this story with us, and I want you to know that you have my support! I grew up as an Asian in my home and with my family friends, but as an American outside. It's been tough seeing Asians (and other people of color) in media being limited to stereotypes. We each have a rich culture and history that often manifest in the words we choose, the things we do, and the foods we eat, and many non-Asian creators fail to capture that. With that being said, I look forward to what you have to show us, and how your culture has influenced you and your work.

On a side note, I'm interested to see how your grandparents' stories will influence MONSTRESS. My grandpa told stories about guerrilla warfare and my grandma would talk about military occupation, so it'll be interesting to dive into a world that was inspired by such stories.

With much thanks,
Chris S.

Thank you for this journey that I have just begun and can't wait to continue. I think we need this story now more than ever and need to believe that we, as a people, can fight monsters without becoming one in the process. I look forward to reading what's next.

Brennan C.

Thanks so much for delivering such an amazing first issue of MONSTRESS. Not only is the artwork amazing, but the story so far is captivating. I love engaging with important issues like race and feminism in creative ways, and this new series looks like it will be doing just that.

This series couldn't have come at a better time. I'm finishing up my last semester in college and I will be referencing your book in a paper for my Gender in Asia class. Can't wait to read the next installment, and good luck to you all.

Rob J.

I've been waiting for this comic since my local shop informed me that it was going to exist, and, having obtained the first issue, I've

been absolutely ecstatic over how amazing it is! I'd love to buy every issue, but I am a poor college student that has to make ends meet. Realistically, I can only justify buying the trade editions long-term, but I do worry that that isn't enough support to keep a comic I like in print.

So my question is this: are there other ways to support your comic, besides rabid word-of-mouth, that will meaningfully help? Enthusiasm isn't always enough – we all need to eat, after all!

Thank you for your time and this amazing comic!

Elisa S.

Thank you, Elisa! That's incredibly kind, and we appreciate your thoughtfulness from the bottom of our hearts. The best way to support any work of art you love is still by talking about it, whether you discuss it with friends, share it on social media, or even create fan art or other transformative works! Purchasing trade editions will still be a huge support to the MONSTRESS team in the long run – but word of mouth is the most powerful tool of all.

I just finished Issue 1 and, wow, I am breathless. I recognized her too, even without a war in my past. I think we all have a rage-filled girl in us somewhere, and it is marvelous to see her taking names. One look at her face and I knew I would love this story (plus the charm of little fox). Your summary at the back was really powerful too. I just wanted to write in right away and tell you how much I enjoyed it. From start to finish, I didn't look up. Please keep it going! Ongoing! We need this book in the world.

With appreciation and anticipation,
Sophie K.B.

I don't know what else I can add to all your praise. I know that manga is the term for Japanese comics, but I feel as though this is the best anime I've ever read. MONSTRESS comes to life off of the page and sucks you into its unique, beautiful, yet terrifying world. This was the first time in many years that I picked up an unknown title based on cover art alone. And I'm glad I did!

You have also woven a rich mythology. This may be too early to ask, but will there be possible spin-offs, a prequel, or some other look into this world?

Keep up the good work and thanks for a truly entertaining piece of art!

Brian S.

P.S. And for letter column names, how about Mistress Monstress, Monstress Meow (cats, had to try) or Monstress Inside of Me.

Thank you, Brian! Right now we're focused on bringing MONSTRESS to life, and haven't given much thought to any spin-offs or prequels – though never say never! That said, the Professor Tam Tam lectures at the back of various issues will offer readers a deeper look at the world: histories, legends, politics. And thanks for the suggestions! We're going to stick with the simplest of them all: *Monstress Mail.*

Dear MONSTRESS Team,

I want to tell you how absolutely fantastic Sana Takeda's artwork is. I am an amateur comic creator, and the sheer effort Sana put into her work exhausted me just to contemplate it. I also enjoy Marjorie's story – I can tell she has invested a great deal of backstory into it.

My only little criticism is that I was hoping for a stronger Asian ("an alternate 1900s Asia") ambience. Words like "Constantine", "Cumae" – these all hearken to Roman and European influence.

But, that being said, Marjorie is writing in the style of modern fantasy. I mean, look at *Attack on Titan* – it is Japanese but set in Germany-looking world. In any event, the name stuff doesn't matter, and I enjoy the complexity and depth of the plot.

Tim H.

Hi, Tim! Thank you so much for writing! Sana is absolutely fabulous, and we're so glad you love her work.

Regarding your hopes for a stronger Asia: It's important to understand the breadth of what was, and is, considered to be *"the Orient"* – a historical term used by scholars to describe a geographical and cultural landscape that encompassed not just what we think of as modern Asia, but the Middle East, parts of Eastern Europe, and for some countries, Northern Africa.

Asia, in that context, has long been a hybrid space, filled with endless cultural complexity and influences. Those influences, however, could be felt even more strongly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; by the early 1900s, all major Chinese cities had foreign enclaves and a culture that was shot through with western colonial definitions of the modern – arguably oppressive, and practiced down to a cruel art (as could be attested in other parts of Asia, particularly India and Vietnam). My own experiences in China form the blood and bone of MONSTRESS, and as a writer I was less interested in dreams of Asian purity than in exploring the mixed hybridic Asia I know so well – and that I'm part of in very personal ways.

That's it for this month's letters! Don't be shy! Keep sending us your thoughts, fan art – even photos of your cats. We love it all.

- *Marjorie*

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

NEXT ISSUE

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